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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## INFORMATION REPORT \_

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July 53

COUNTRY Thailand

SUBJECT Sociological Conditions/Political Activity by Laotians/ Communication Facilities

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- 1. The population of northeast Thailand consists predominately of native Thai, Vietnamese, and a sprinkling of Chinese and Indians in the villages. Most Vietnamese support themselves as truck farmers and as skilled labor in the towns. The Thai are rice farmers, though a few of them have become entrepreneurs in the villages and towns. Chirese and Indians usually support themselves as merchants. The general economic condition of the area is normally at the subsistence level for most. For the farmers this is particularly true, though truck farmers are able to earn more income than rice farmers. The merchant class is capable of building up some capital. As of March 1953 the economic status of northeast Thailand was extremely poor relative to the rest of Thailand but in a normal condition for the area.
- 2. Vietnamese residents of Theilard have been obliged to donate food and money to the Viet Minh forces in Indochina since the fighting began in that country. Viet Minh agents circulate surreptitiously in northeast Thailand collecting funds from the Vietnamese. Most of the donating is done voluntarily as the Vietnamese residents have a deeprooted hatred for the French. A limited amount of recruiting is done also for Viet Minh forces. In January 1953, recruiting was being conducted at Dhondu (17°28'N 103°41'E) Thai National Police cannot effectively control the practise as the road network is primitive and it is virtually impossible to patrol properly. The Mekong River boundary between Thailand and Laos offer: no problem for illegal crossing.
- 3. Communist sympathizers exist amongst the Vietnamese, particularly in area opposite Vientiane, Laoa. The village of B Tha Bo (17°50:N = 102°04'E) is practically a Communist settlement. In addition, most of the Vietnamese are nationalists who support the Viet Minh inoposition to the French.
- 4. Anti-French feeling of the Vietnamese extends even to the clergy. French Bishop Claude Bayet, vicar apostolic of mortheast Thailand and west Laos is now completely ineffective. Catholic Vietnamese walked out of a Mass he was saying in Nakhon Phanom in December 1952. Bayet lives in the village of Tara (17018'N 10402'E), on Lake Lahan, just north of Sakon Nakhon. Vietnamese priests have disassociated themselves as much as possible from the French clergy. Beginning in 1952, the attitude of the

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Vietnamese towards US citizens has deteriorated markedly. This is due to the US military aid being given the French in Indochina, and US citizens are beginning to experience the same difficulties as the French when dealing with the Vietnamese.

- 5. The Free Lao organization is active in northeast Thailand, advocating the formation of an independent Laotian State including Laos and parts of Thailand. Tieng Sirikhan is the leader of the organization in the northeast area. He is also a legislative representative in Bangkok from Sakon Nakhon. His brother is active in the Free Lao organization also and both have been in direct opposition to Premier Phibun. In February 1953, Tieng's car was found abandoned on Burma border, and he has not been seen since. Several years ago, Tieng visited the US as the guest of a US citizen \_\_\_\_\_ who owns a mulberry grove at Nong Khai, Thailand. Tieng is about 43, and speaks good English.
- 6. Road conditions in northeast Thailand are but fair. The primary road between Udon (17°25'N 102°47'E) and Nakhon Phanom (17°24'N 104°46'E) via Sakon Nakhon is gravel surface suitable for continuing two way traffic. Work gangs are kept on the road. It is all weather. The road between Udon and Chiang Khan (17°53'N 101°36'E) via Muang Loei (17°31'N 101°33'E) has been improved and is now all weather gravel surface. Limited two way traffic is possible. Steel bridges have been erected across Huei Fhon River at Wang Saphung (17°23'N 101°37'E), and across Nam Loei River at Ban Thet (17°43'N 101°35'E).

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